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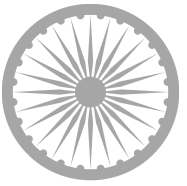
Chapter  *Three*

Faiz, Love, and the Fellowship of the Oppressed

SYED AKBAR HYDER

The cultural fronts on which the Cold War was fought are more difficult to discern than the geopolitical ones. These fronts were fortified by historical memories that are mediated much more ambiguously than the seemingly bipolar political ones—through folktales, music, sports, and poetry. Urdu poetry of the Cold War era, popular in both India and Pakistan, challenged neat loyalties to nation-states. In the Cold War context, India's alignment with the Soviet Union and Pakistan's with the United States has persisted as a given. The extent to which citizens of these nations, especially their poets (many of whom remain the prime bastions of resistance to their status quo), fractured these alignments merits discussion. In this chapter I tell a story of one such poet, Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911–1984). Faiz was a citizen of Pakistan who was equally popular in India; he was a visionary who evoked resistance to oppression by grouping Karl Marx's principles of economic justice with those of the Qur'an and Islamic mysticism; he was a poet who lifted up with gumption a millennium-old genre of Perso-Urdu lyrical poetry, the *ghazal*, on the pillars of concrete sociopolitical struggles around him. A keen observer of nature, Faiz threaded his way across continents, raising awareness of the subaltern plight through his poetry and activism. He called for a collective of witnesses, shorn of vengeance. The story of Faiz's poetry thus brings to the forefront the romance of alternative imaginings of a community in a world devastated by wars, occupations, executions, and poverty. The poetic overtones of this story do not neatly accord with the geopolitical ones to which we are accustomed. The way that Faiz challenges the us-against-

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them mentality—by anchoring himself in a space that defies any nation-state—highlights the Cold War's intersectionality and a single man's ethical prowess and determination to redress the injustices around him in the language of love. I first discuss how Faiz reframes love in his poetry; I then describe how this reframing alerts us to a vision of an alternative fellowship of citizens and nations that does not sync with the mutually exclusive ideologies that the Cold War posited.

In 1982, the city of Bombay celebrated with pomp the completion of fifty years of sound in Indian films. The occasion was especially uplifted by the presence of Noor Jahan, a singer hailed as the "melody queen" in South Asia, an actor who had played a formidable role in the Indian cinema of the 1940s but who had migrated to Pakistan after that country was created in 1947 and became what might be called one of their national voices. As a gesture of gratitude to an enormous following in India and backed by popular demand, Noor Jahan sang, "Mujh se pahlī sī muḥabbat merī maḥbūb nah māñg" (The love like the former one? Beloved, do not ask of me), a poem that had acquired a legendary status in South Asia:

Main ne samjhā thā keh tū hai to darakhshāñ hai hayāt
Terā gham hai to gham-e dahr kā jhagṛā kyā hai
Terī sūrat se hai 'ālam meñ bahāroñ ko sabāt
Terī ānkhoñ ke sivā dunyā meñ rakhā kyā hai
Tū jo mil jāye to taqdīr nigūñ ho jāye
Yūñ nah thā main ne faqat chāhā thā yūñ ho jāye
Aur bhī dukh haiñ zamāne meñ muḥabbat ke sivā
Rāḥateñ aur bhī haiñ vasl kī rāḥat ke sivā
Anganat sadiyoñ ke tārīk bahīmānah tilism
Resham o atlast o kimkhāb meñ bunwāye hūe
Jā bajā bikte hūe kuchah o bāzār men jism
Khāk meñ lithṛe hūe khūn meñ nahlāye hūe
Laut jātī hai udhar ko bhī nazar kyā kijiye
Ab bhī dilkash hai tera husn magar kyā kijiye
Mujh se pahlī sī muḥabbat merī maḥbūb nah māñg

I had thought: as long as you remain, life glows
As long as I pine for you, I need not confront life
Your form lends permanence to the springs of the world
Beyond your eyes? Was anything worth my sight!
When I met up with you, fate surrendered to me—

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All of this was not it; I only wished for it.
There are sorrows around us,
apart from the sorrows of love,
other comforts prevail, apart from the comfort of union
Countless, begrimed, brutal spells of centuries
Netted into silk, satin, velvet
Bodies sold everywhere, in the streets, at the markets
Spattered with muck, bathed in blood
My gaze returns to all of that, how can I resist
Your beauty still enchants, yet,
What can be done!
The love like the former one? Beloved! Do not ask from me.[1]

The occasion for this song was Noor Jahan's first visit to the post-1947 India. Noor Jahan's audiences applauded her as a bridge builder, as an artist who rose above parochial geographies and ideologies, much like the poet who had composed the lyrics, Faiz Ahmed Faiz. As the distinguished literary historian Malik Ram contends, Faiz was one of the three most authoritative voices that emerged in twentieth-century Urdu literature of South Asia—the other two being those of Muhammad Iqbal and Josh Malihabadi.[2]

Cultural historians and literary critics laud Faiz's poem "The Love Like the Former One?" that Noor Jahan sang as a "revolutionary" testament of a new vision of love. This poem artfully sets the tone for a love that is not exclusivist and can be read as an allegory of a challenge to unconditional loyalty to any nation-state or superpower. Through this poem Faiz takes Urdu on a voyage that recalibrates the dynamics of traditional love lyrics, the *ghazal*. Whereas the overtures of the *ghazal* were framed by a masochistic lover impressing on his beloved linguistic flair, eloquence, fealty, and resignation, Faiz resorts to a different mode of poetry, the *naẓm*, and addresses the beloved with a compassionate indictment of the old ways of love. Arguably, this form of poetry (*naẓm*), looser in structure than the *ghazal*, is itself an incrimination of the old form of poetry in which love was dominantly couched.

The *ghazal*, a mono-rhymed multithemed lyrical form of poetry tacks between the *'ishq-e majāzī*, the eros, and *'ishq-e ḥaqīqī*, the agape. The poet of the *ghazal* assumes many personas, at times simultaneously: he is a masochistic forlorn lover who takes pride in emplotting his suffering in ever-new ways; he can be ephemeral or perennial; his poetry testifies to the *takhallus*, the pen-name, he chooses for himself; his gender is in flux even when he speaks in the male voice; the orientation of his love can be homosexual,

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heterosexual, or pansexual, all categories that arose in the twentieth century and thus cannot be projected on times before that; he knows well that if his art is to see the light of the day, his motifs will be judged according to how well they respond to those of other poets who share not only his region and language but also the multilingual universe in which the idioms of his poetry flourish; his claims can reach the grandiosity of those men and women who confronted the establishment of kings, prophets, and gods; he is a product of long-term evolution and associated with legendary martyrs, lovers, and other poets; he evinces misgivings about the status quo and does not mind the confinement to society's margins; he realizes that the gains he makes through verse can be relinquished under the imperative of prose. While the lover's voice remains dominant in the *ghazal*, the audience also acquires a sense of the beloved: taller than a cypress, prettier than a rose, hotter than a candle's flame, more alluring than Joseph of Canaan, stronger than Moses, God or godlike, and so on and so forth.

I would like to pause on the fact that for Faiz the *ghazal* continues to hold a hegemonic aesthetic status. Unlike many of his contemporaries, many of whom, including Josh Malihabadi, were influenced by the colonially inflected critique of the *ghazal* by Altaf Husain Hali,[3] Faiz does not castigate the *ghazal* for being bereft of realism or excessively decadent. Instead, he gently nudges the genre out of its complacency the way he nudges his beloved to defer to love in its pluralistic hues. Acutely aware of how much his audiences rejoiced in the *ghazal* genre, he addresses the beloved in a way that can also be read as an allegorical address to the old genre. As though the lover is professing: I am not quitting you, but neither am I loving you and surrendering to you the way I had once done.

Faiz's most important source of emulation, Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), was beholden to the thoughts of the greatest nineteenth-century Urdu poet, Mirza Ghalib, and had already pressed into the service of socioreligious reform movements such professions. Iqbal also paid attention to the cultural fallout of British colonialism and fended off attempts to place Muslims and their literary traditions as the bane of progress.

The year in which Faiz was born in the Punjab province of British India, into a family of Afghan immigrants, was also the year in which Iqbal launched his impetuous complaint, *Shikwah*, against God, in a poetry assembly of Lahore:

Kabhī ham se kabhī ghairoñ se shanāsāī hai
Bāt kahne kī nahīñ tū bhī to harjāī hai

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At times you befriend me, at times my rivals,
Pardon my speech: you also are a two-timer

Iqbal was a lawyer by training, and he had received his higher education, including a doctorate, in Europe. To him Islam overlapped with the traditions of the Enlightenment, especially those tied to Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, and Karl Marx. Many of Iqbal's poems chart a course of Muslim history that splendidly begins with the community of the Prophet Muhammad and gradually faces decline. Faiz admitted time and again to growing up in Iqbal's shadow, although the forfeiture to Muslim exceptionalism in Faiz's verses separates the two poets.

Legend has it that Muhammad Iqbal was in the audience when Faiz first recited the poem that Noor Jahan so compellingly sang many decades later. When Iqbal heard Faiz in a poetry assembly held at Lahore's Government College in the scorching July of 1936, he in fact predicted that Faiz would go on to become a towering poet in his own right.[4]

The poetry assemblies, *mushāʿirahs*, bring together poets and their audiences for an interactive performance. Many of these poetry assemblies, especially in Faiz's time, witnessed the relaying of social concerns relevant to the poets and their mass audiences as much as they witnessed the articulation of verses eliciting aesthetic appreciation based on age-old principles of beauty and creativity. The worldviews expounded in these assemblies are inflected by the agendas of the participating poets and their audience and framed by an array of sentiments, including those of love, religion, patriotism, justice, war, and peace. While the poets angle for a position in the literary pantheon by displaying the ability to outwit those who are their peers as well as their forebears, the crowds enjoy a rapport with the poets by applauding particular verses and calling for encores. These assemblies, especially at moments when the states of Pakistan and India suspended democratic principles, provided an enclave of resistance. Much could be said in these gatherings, and when called for accountability, poets could get away by invoking poetic license. Of course, streams of defiant verses would also churn up the defenders of the state, resulting in the incarceration of the poets. To the poignancy of poetry, incarcerations were a godsend.

With each passing poetry assembly, Faiz's fame grew, and he established a community of devotees who jostled to see him in Lahore as much as they did in London. Faiz's poems circulated widely in India from the 1940s, in their original as well as in translation, as the poet's popularity surged in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s in languages other than Urdu. An essay in the *Times of*

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India in 1971 aptly summarized the reason behind Faiz's charm: "Even while describing the dark side of life, he holds out great hope for mankind."[5] Perhaps it was for this reason that three of India's prime ministers, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, and I. K. Gujral, showed stirring admiration for Faiz's words.[6] Gulzar, modern India's renowned poet and filmmaker, reminds his audience of a time when Faiz was stopped at India's eastern border for not carrying with him the required entry documents. Jyoti Basu, the communist chief minister of West Bengal, went to the airport and made sure that Faiz was not detained. The chief minister told the immigration authorities that Faiz belonged to the entire subcontinent and not to any one country. The poet did not need a passport, for his very countenance was his passport.[7] The Indians also knew, at least from the 1950s, that Faiz was triumphing as the poet of conscience in spite of being tormented by the state of Pakistan.

The one seamless historical sequence of British colonialism (in which Faiz was born), nationalism (which Faiz witnessed as an ugly outcome of colonialism just when the poet thought the colonial victims could actually aspire to and attain a just distribution of resources), and authoritarianism (which buoyed the interests of new imperial powers that left the weak as vulnerable as they were during the colonial high noon) branded Faiz's politics from the 1940s. Even though the content of his struggles varied, love remained his matrix. He pursued this love across continents, in wars cold and hot.

When Pakistan came into existence in 1947, instead of celebrating the birth of the nation, Faiz wrote a lament as the earliest entry in the new South Asia's diary:

Yeh dāgh dāgh ujālā yeh shabgazīdah saḥar
Voh inteẓār thā jis kā yeh voh saḥar to nahīñ
Yeh voh saḥar to nahīñ jis kī ārzū le kar
Chale the yār keh mil jāegī kahīñ nah kahīñ
Falak ke dasht meñ tāroñ kī ākhirī manzil[8]

This scarred light, this night-struck dawn
That for which we waited—this is not that dawn
This is not the dawn, in the quest of which
Our comrades had embarked
Looking for the final destination of the stars
In the wilderness of the skies

The interplay of light and darkness, the search for roads and destinations, the reassessment of the communities of comrades, friends, rivals, and

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lovers—this distinguishes Faiz's poetry from that of his comrades. Much to the dismay of his Soviet-leaning friends, Faiz refuses to sketch the awaited dawn in clear-cut ideological hues.

On multiple occasions the poet took the initiative to blend the horizons of his carnal beloved and the beloved that is his homeland. The word he uses for homeland, *vatan*, itself yields meaning that suggests an expanse beyond the modern nation-state.

The suffering that had set aglow Faiz's imagination when speaking of the beloved's taunts and whims was the same suffering that he underwent when cementing his relationship with his homeland. And just like the traditional *ghazal* lover, the lover-Faiz proudly lacks one attribute, regret:

> Is 'ishq nah us 'ishq pe nādim hai magar dil
> Har dāgh hai is dil meñ bajuz dāgh-e nidāmat[9]
>
> The heart regrets neither this love nor that one
> It has every scar, save that of regret

The late 1940s and early 1950s political climate in which Faiz wrote was tense. His Pakistan had to stand up on its feet with its displaced limbs—the territory of West Pakistan was split from the East by hundreds of miles. How exactly religion (especially Islam) would prefigure the nation's identity was yet to be determined. How severely the future course of the country would be paved by concerns for economic justice was speculative.

Apart from his calling as a poet, Faiz worked in journalism, as the editor of Pakistan's leading newspaper, the *Pakistan Times*. It was during his tenure at this newspaper, in March 1951, that he was accused of conspiring to alter the democratic course of Pakistan in what became known as the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case. He was not alone. A few of Pakistan's army officers as well as Sajjad Zaheer, the general secretary of the Pakistan Communist Party, also stood accused. One concern that prompted the "conspirators" seemed to be related to the alignment of Pakistan's government with that of the United States—that drawing close to the United States would make Pakistan vulnerable to Cold War violence.[10] The conspiracy, to whatever extent it was one, did not come to a fruition.

However, as a consequence, Pakistan's government tried Faiz and promptly sent him to prison, where he spent the next four years of his life. It was his prison experience that bestowed on South Asia poetry even finer than what he had written as a free man. From the prisons of Pakistan, Faiz wrote of hope:

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Yeh gham jo is rāt ne diā hai
Yeh gham saḥar kā yaqīn banā hai
Yaqīn jo gham se karīmtar hai
Saḥar jo shab se ʻaẕīmtar hai[11]

The sorrow that the night has bestowed on us
This sorrow has turned into the certainty of the dawn
The certainty that is more merciful than sorrow
The dawn that is mightier than the night

Even though the Perso-Urdu world had encountered the metaphoric prisons in which the lover found himself by the grace of the beloved's sadistic cruelty, Faiz's incarceration at the decree of a modern nation-state and his *ghazals* reflecting the grace with which he was standing his ground endeared him to his devotees even more:

Maqām faiz koī rāh meñ jachā hī nahīñ
Jo kū-e yār se nikle to sū-e dār chale[12]

Faiz, I did not find an apt stopover on the road
When I departed from the beloved's lane,
I headed straight to the gallows

Faiz did not spare the United States, Pakistan's chief albeit unreliable ally, when speaking of the plight of his birth land. For instance, he protested the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in 1953 on the charges of espionage for the Soviet Union and expressed solidarity with the executed:

Qatl gāhoñ se chun kar hamāre ʻalam
Aur nikleñge ʻushshāq ke qāfile
Jin ki rāh-e ṭalab se hamāre qadam
Mukhtiṣar kar chale dard ke fāsle
Kar chale jin ki khāṭir jahāñgīr ham
Jāñ ganvā kar terī dilbarī kā bharam
Ham jo tārīk rāhoñ men māre gaye[13]

Collecting our battle standards from the slaughterhouses
More caravans of lovers will emerge
The lovers whose desired paths
Have reduced the distance of sorrow for us
The lovers for whose sake:

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We lost our lives
And seized the trust of your heart-stealing charm
We who were killed on the dark road

Faiz joined the ranks of those protesting the U.S. intervention in Iran in 1953 that resulted in the overthrow of a democratically elected government and the return of the despotic Shah. Several Iranian students were killed protesting this intervention, and Faiz turned their legacy into the precious jewelry of the queen of life, jewelry that was mercilessly pounded:

Yeh kaun sakhī haiñ
Jin ke lahū kī
Ashrafiyāñ chhan chhan chhan chhan
Dhartī ke paiham pyāse
Kashkol meñ ḍhaltī jātī haiñ
Kashkol ko bhartī jātī haiñ
Yeh kaun javāñ haiñ arz-e ʿajam
Yeh lakh lut
Jin ke jismoñ kī
Bharpūr javānī kā kundan
Yūn khāk meñ rezah rezah hai
Yun kūchah kūchah bikhrā hai
Aye arz-e ʿajam aye arz-e ʿajam[14]

Who are these generous ones
The gold coins of whose precious blood
Jingle by jingle
Fall into the ever-thirsty bowl of the earth
Continue to fill the bowl
Who are these youths, O land of Iran
The extravagance of their bodies
The gold of their wholesome youth
Is shred to pieces in the dust,
Squandered in the streets
O Land of Iran, O Land of Iran

Faiz then turned to Africa for an embrace, to tell the world that he was one with the continent that struggled to be liberated from racist colonial control:

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Ā jāo maiñ ne sun lī tere ḍhol ke tirang[15]

Come to me, I've heard the beat of your drums
Come to me, the pulse of my blood is drunk
Come to me, Africa
. . . . . .
The earth throbs with me, Africa
The seas flutter and the forests chime in
I am Africa: I've taken on your form
I am you, my gait is that of your lion
Come to me, Africa
Come to me, the lion's gait
Come to me, Africa

Annihilation in the love (*fanā fil 'ishq*) had been an age-old desire of Muslim mystics. Everyone from Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922) in Iraq to Amir Khusro (d. 1325) in Delhi had lyricized it. The Qur'anic idea that all of God's creation comes from Him and ultimately returns to Him had inspired much of the *fanā* discourse. By giving this poem the title "Africa Come Back," Faiz suggests that Africa had been temporarily separated from him, just as all of us are separated from our origin at birth (or, as Jalaluddin Rumi would say, the reed is separated from the reed bed) and it was high time for this separation to end and for Africa to become one with him.

Prison empowered Faiz the way exile empowered Edward Said's Erich Auerbach—it forced him to retreat into reflections of his self and society in the lingering presence of solitude, imagination, and memories. He found his cell's darkness so seductive that he compared it to the lushest of the rose gardens: "In the prison it was as though one has fallen in love all over again. My love in prison was with poetry."[16] Rather than considering the prison the bane of his life, he speaks of its redemptive value—a value that clarifies for him his unconditional love for the beloved, his resolution, no matter the duress:

When is it that you are not by my side
in my thoughts
When is it that my hand is not in yours
A hundred thanks: among our nights
Not one is that of parting

If the going gets tough there
let's dispose of the heart and give up life

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Oh brave souls! In the beloved's lane
Do we not have these options left?

The style with which one walks into the chambers of death
It is that dignity which lives on
This life comes and goes
Its value is not worth a mention

The ground of fealty is no king's court
Who cares here about names and descent
Lover is not a given name, passion is not in one's essence

If the game is that of love
Wage it all, why the fear
If you win, bravo!
If you fail, there is no loss[17]

After his release from the prison, when Faiz was invited to China, he gushed in his versified travelogue at the human collective and its potential to reshape the world that would bring more joy to its underprivileged. He could feel China's millions in his own embrace of love and justice.[18]

And then there was a more instructive journey, to Cuba: when Faiz visited this nation in 1964, he remembered how idealism had also manifested itself in Pakistan's early years. But Cuba had progressed much more than Pakistan had — Cuba did this by curbing U.S. imperialism, creating an egalitarian order that did not foreclose the possibility of a more ideal political system, where the establishment of justice was an ongoing project. Cuba, to Faiz, echoed with music. Our poet was also taken by Cuba's remarkable gender dynamics — Cuba's women could look good as women and wear the uniform of formidable guards protecting the nation's institutions. Faiz in his travelogue addresses several critical points raised by Cuba's adversaries to abrogate the significance of its revolution. To those who say that Cuba opted to take a step back in time by freeing itself of U.S. influence, Faiz reminds them that the United States had worked with Cuba's landlords and other forces of exploitation to shackle the small nation. Faiz in this travelogue ardently defended socialist principles and disavowed any redemptive aspects of capitalism. That Cuba was regressing with its communist form of government made no sense to him. He lends a line from Ghalib's *ghazal* to highlight Cuba's poverty when it existed in the U.S. sphere of exploitation and as his response to socialist Cuba's adversaries:

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Ghar meñ thā kyā keh terā gham use ghārat kartā[19]
What was there in the house that would be destroyed by your sorrow

Presumably the lover here is telling the beloved that the latter need not take comfort in bringing about the former's destruction. When Ghalib had become aware of the rumors that the British pillaged Delhi in and after 1857, he apparently responded with this couplet: there was nothing there in the first place to pillage. Faiz shares Ghalib's attitude when it comes to commenting on Cuba's state before it came under the auspices of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. And Faiz's readers know very well where Ghalib took this line of thinking: the one thing that had been there was a longing for "building," and that longing simply cannot be pillaged (*voh jo rakhte the ham ik hasrat-e t'amīr so hai*). Faiz furnishes this longing as the basis of solidarity with the people of Cuba.

As though to remind his audiences that he was as much of a classical *ghazal* poet as he was a committed socialist and revolutionary, Faiz composed multivocal lines that could be read as the complaint old lovers had of their beloved and the complaint god's creation had against god's inert existence:

Miṭ jāyegī makhlūq to insāf karoge
Munṣif ho to ab ḥashr uthā kyūñ nahīñ dete[20]

When the creation will be wiped out, then you will render justice?
If you are the Just One, why do you not summon the doomsday now!

Doomsday in Abrahamic faiths is reserved for the ultimate accountability and justice. The poet in Faiz wonders how such an idea syncs with justice itself—with so much havoc wreaked by exploitation, what is the point of postponing justice to a time that is shrouded in mystery, in uncertainty? He calls on his supporters to take action against injustice and not simply tear up:

Chashm-e nam jān-e shoridah kāfī nahīñ[21]

The tear-filled eyes, the passionate soul—they are not sufficient
Carrying the accusation of a hidden love—this is not enough
Today, walk in fetters through the market
Walk with the stars in your hands, dancing and drunk
With the dust on your head, and blood on your clothes
The entire city of lovers awaits you, get moving

Mansur al-Hallaj (executed in 922 C.E.) went to the gallows at the command of his detractors for claiming oneness with the Truth—*ana'l ḥaq*.

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Those who sided with Hallaj's executioners interpreted *ḥaq* to mean God and, consequently, Hallaj's claim as a compromise of God's Oneness. To Iqbal, *ḥaq* meant "Creative Truth," as Salim Akhtar points out,[22] and this is the Truth that is a reflection of constantly unfolding creation and has to be sought out and cultivated by each one of God's creation. Faiz aligns himself with this reading of the Truth and, rather than rendering it esoteric, casts it as broadly inclusive. His most powerful poem in the 1970s, the one that is sung in confrontation to the rise of the brutal Pakistani dictator Zia ul Haq, blends *ana'l ḥaq* with a verse from a powerful Qur'anic chapter, *Raḥmān* (And there will remain the face of Your Lord, Owner of Majesty and Honor), and an American civil rights anthem inspired by the Gospel musical tradition, "We Shall Overcome":

We will see
It is for sure that we will see:
That day which has been promised to us
That day which has been written on the tablet of eternity
When the mighty mountains of tyranny and oppression
Will fly away like the cotton balls
Under the feet of us, the subjected
The earths will throb
Upon the heads of the rulers
Lightning will roar
From the Ka'ba of God's earth
All false idols will be lifted
We, with the pure souls, we, the outcasts of the holy sanctuaries
Will be seated with pomp
All the crowns will be cast to the winds
All the thrones will be made to fall
Only Allah's name will remain
He who is hidden and He who is manifest
One who is the spectacle and the One who is the spectator
The cry of "I am the Truth" will rise
That Truth that is you and that is I
And God's creation will rule
The creation that is you and that is I[23]

The poignancy of this anthem should be noted in the context of its popularity throughout South Asia, especially as the United States cozied up to the Pakistani dictator, an intimacy that would eventually push the United States

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and Pakistan into an ancillary war with the Soviet Union on the doomed fields of Afghanistan.

Faiz knew well that the movement of his pen would be severely bridled if he continued to live in the Pakistan of the late 1970s. He chose exile for himself and, after a brief stint in the Soviet Union and India, ended up in Beirut. He embraced the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupation—an occupation that was only bolstered by U.S. support. Faiz protested Palestine's subjugation by writing a variation of his anti-Zia song; this song was redolent with hope:

> We will win
> Verily, we will win
> Ultimately, we will win
> What fear do we have of the enemy's attack
> The chest of every warrior is a shield
> What fear of the blitz of fate
> The souls of martyrs have girded their loins
> What fear
> We will win
> Verily, we will win
> "And say, the Truth has arrived and the Falsehood has vanished"
> (17:81)
> So says the Greatest of the Lords
> Heaven is under our feet
> And the shadow of mercy upon our heads
> Then why the fear
> We will win
> Verily, we will win
> Ultimately, we will win one day[24]

This "we" in which Faiz spoke rebelled against the territorial nation-state and against neat temporal divisions—Faiz's comrade was the God of the Qur'an who promised vindication for the oppressed as much as he was the tenth-century Iraqi Sufi martyr Mansur al-Hallaj or the twentieth-century communist Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet. The night of oppression in which Faiz writhed was the night that he shared with the old lovers who longed for their beloved, but it was also the night that had sprung from the pain that was much more than that of you and I: *yeh rāt us dard kā shajar hai jo mujh se tujh se ʿaẕīmtar hai*.[25] As the Kashmir-born Agha Shahid Ali, one of Faiz's most

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prominent devotees in the world of English poetry, points out: "In Faiz's poetry, suffering is seldom, perhaps never, private (in the sense the suffering of confessional poets). Though deeply personal, it is almost never isolated from a sense of history and injustice."[26] In this vein, Faiz made it clear that unlike Josh Malihabadi's faith in the individual revolutionary taking on the feudal order, Faiz's revolutionary hero is auxiliary to the communities and classes that are fighting for justice. His hero actually embodies a class, not a lone individual.[27] Similarly, the nation is not trammeled by cartography, nor is it beholden to a solidarity other than the one anchored in justice for its most vulnerable members.

In song after song, Faiz clarified how the front lines of fidelity were not the courts of kings where ranks are bestowed on the basis of names and lineages; Lover is not a name with which one is born; and Love is not a birthright[28]—all of this has to be cultivated in response one's context, keeping in mind the privileges that shape us and the silences that serve us.

Though clearly aligned with the grand Marxist aspirations of economic justice, Faiz through his poetry opens up a third front. He joins the Marxists with the intersectional understanding that he would be able to transform the world not simply by joining them but by appreciating culture-specific interpretations and creating a solidarity with them to move forward in a direction that is yet to be determined: "I do not feel socialism is a cure-all, whose recipe is applicable in all places. Every country has its own recipe. The [countries of the world] need to keep in mind their own conditions and traditions . . . socialism is a strategy not faith."[29] He is cautious when it comes to dismissing religion—that which comforts millions. Just as his love calls for more inclusivism, so does his nation-state, his socialism, his Islam.

Even though he did not belong to the Pakistan Communist Party formally, as Faiz's Soviet interpreter and biographer, Ludmila Vassilyeva, points out, during the Cold War, Faiz was rendered into Russian by acclaimed Soviet poets, and he remained one of the most popular South Asian poets there. In 1962 he, along with Pablo Picasso, won the Soviet Union's most acclaimed award reserved for the non-Soviet citizens, the International Lenin Peace Prize. With evident personal enjoyment he spoke of the general Soviet accomplishments glowingly, although he was careful not to sing praises of particular leaders in his poetry. Vassilyeva states: "In spite of his unattained armour for the country, Faiz actually wrote very little on the Soviet subject as opposed to other progressive writers and if you look closely, you will find few poets and writers who have not written stories or poems about Moscow,

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Stalin, Lenin and the Red Square. In all of the long years of his association with the Soviet Union, he probably wrote only two poems directly dealing with the system."[30]

To Faiz's left-leaning critics, his ambiguous poetic language was a meager overture that actually muddied the cause of justice. Ali Sardar Jafri, a card-carrying member of the Communist Party of India, struggled to see Faiz's positive intervention in the world of poetry and progress when Faiz, according to Jafri, did not spell out the terms of freedom in his poem "Freedom's Dawn" and simply said that the dawn the subcontinent witnessed after the colonial night was not the awaited dawn. The vagueness of Faiz's verse, compounded by his obsession to couch ideas in idioms of sexual romance, in Jafri's opinion, was an insult to India's freedom fighters, whose "sacrifices were much loftier than sexual deprivations."[31]

To those studying Faiz as a "people's poet," perhaps he seemed overindulgent when he stockpiled his verses with images of precious stones and fabrics that the masses could not even recognize. One of his eloquent Marxist critics, Ralph Russell, writes: "His beloved is not simply a woman; she is a lady—a lady with plenty of money and plenty of leisure to spend on make-up, fine clothes and rare perfume, and it is these, rather than any intrinsic qualities (for he rarely mentions any) that Faiz seems to find attractive."[32]

What Russell does not recognize is that Faiz's verses bespoke his ability to address the beloved with a full recognition of all the capital, the *sarmāya*, that the beloved bore; the fine jewels in which he was bedecked; the lofty mansions he occupied. The lover could claim many shortcomings for himself but not the one of misrecognition. After recognizing the beloved for who he was, the lover invited him into his world to see the price at which luxury came.

The most riveting ideas that well from the tidal waves of Faiz's poetry are those concerning the confluence of people across vast spans, not always acclimatized to the rising and subsiding nation-states, political parties, or movements.

Faiz's lover is a composite of social woes across countries, of many centuries, of many fringe circuits. In several poems, Faiz offers subtitles that suggest a context for the poem; the language of many such poems, however, is void of specificities. In other words, if the readers did not read Faiz's subtitle, they would not know from the verses, for instance, that they were in response to the Rosenberg trial. If fact, this trial is a metonymy for all unjust trials wherein the blind majoritarian system oppresses the minority. So is the case with subtitles referring to Beirut and Bangladesh. This device of dis-

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tancing and proximating used by Faiz reminds us that it is one moment for which the poem is applicable but it is not limited to that moment since the poem itself has no abiding references to that moment of history. Poetry here becomes universal and timeless. This strategy worked to Faiz's advantage: wherever Urdu was read (and Urdu had more readers in India than it did in Pakistan for the most part of the Cold War years), Faiz became a phenomenon unlike any other poetic one. Singers vied to sing his poems — from Noor Jahan and Begum Akhtar to Mehdi Hassan and Abida Parveen. He never just spoke as a man from Pakistan; his audiences assured his perpetuity in part by raising him above his nation-state. Even if the nation-states vanished, Faiz would remain as a man who made his readers and listeners conjure up a new *vatan*, a new homeland — one that was aspirationally inclusive. Faiz thus poured out his feelings for a land that could not be contained by borders, for a rival who could share the beloved with the lover, for an imagination whose scope could unite the oppressor and the oppressed with the awe of justice:

Ham se us des kā tum nām o nishāñ pūchte ho
Jis kī tārīkh nah gughrāfiya ab yād āye
Aur yād āye to mahbūb-e guzishtah ki tarh
Rū barū āne se jī ghabrāye[33]

You ask me about the name and whereabouts of that country,
The country whose history and geography I do not recall now
And when I do recall them, then
Like the bygone beloved, he is frazzled to come face to face with me

These verses appear in a poem dedicated to Andrei Voznesensky (1933–2010), the dynamic Russian poet known for saying, "The students of the world are the best nation."[34]

When reading Faiz closely, there is little doubt that he, like his comrades from Turkey (Nazim Hikmet) and South India (Makhdum Mohiuddin), folded himself into the resistance movements that considered U.S. policies at home and abroad as the scourge of their age; our poet adhered more closely to the Soviet vision of his world. Notwithstanding this empathy for the Soviet Union, Faiz recoiled from an all-out exclusivist embrace of this country and an absolute condemnation of the United States. Mutually exclusive love is antiquated in Faiz. To love one beloved and no one else is a halfway measure at best. Faiz profits from the new love that blurs boundaries, including those created by the Cold War. In Urdu, he gives voice to

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many poets writing in other languages but showing solidarity with his kind of love. Faiz especially takes a liking to Nazim Hikmet. He translates some of Hikmet's thoughts:

Ham ne ummīd ke sahāre par
Tūt kar yūñ hī zindagī kī hai
Jis tarah tum se ʻāshiqī kī hai[35]

Placing my stock in hope
I have thus lived my life, head over heels:
The way I have set my heart on you

Drawing at once on the traditions of classical Persian and Urdu poetry, on the progressive strains of twentieth-century Turkish poetry, and on the resistive tropes of Islamic mysticism, Faiz insists that one's opponent is cast as the beloved to whom the well-disposed lover commits without abandoning the impulses of justice. Faiz's poetry allays any sense of retribution. Weary of sanctimony, he strengthens the resolve to love one's enemies in the lyrical language that tries to diminish a polarized world. He proposes a new collective and alerts us to the limitations of our existing language:

Maiñ kyā likhūñ ki jo merā tumhārā rishtah hai
Voh ʻāshiqī kī zabāñ meñ kahīñ bhī darj nahīñ
Likhā gayā hai bahot luṭf-e vasl o dard-e firāq
Magar yeh kaifiyat apnī raqam nahīñ hai kahīñ
Yeh apnā ʻishq ham āghosh jis meñ hijr o visāl
Yeh apnā dard ki hai kab se hamdam-e mah o sāl
Is ʻishq-e khās ko har ek se chhūpāye hūe
Guzar gayā hai zamānah gale lagāe hūe[36]

How shall I write that which binds me to you
It is not listed anywhere in the language of passion
The pleasures of union, the pangs of parting—
    have been written plenty
But this state of ours is not noted anyplace
This passion of ours that embraces parting and union
This pain of ours that's a soulmate to passing times
Hiding this special passion from all
An age has lapsed since I entered your embrace

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NOTES

1. The performance can be viewed at "Noor Jehan Live: Mujhse Pehli Si Mohabbat" (1982), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCJCyZ9yRHw. All English translations of Urdu poetry here are mine. This poem in its entirety appears in the collection of Faiz's poetry: see Faiz Ahmed Faiz, *Nuskhahah-e vafā* (Lahore: Maktabah-e Karvan, n.d.), 61–63.

2. Malik Ram, *Urdu Adab: Faiz Number* 3, 4 (New Delhi: Anjuman-e Taraqqi-e Urdu [Hind], 1985): 11.

3. With the advent of British colonialism in the nineteenth century, many art forms drew colonial ire for not representing the natural world as it really is. The *ghazal* in this discourse stood accused of propagating an imagination that did not correspond to reality, to *nature* as it really is. Many Urdu writers also participated in such modes of criticism and blamed the *ghazal* for holding back the arts of their community. See Frances Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

4. Nasim Fatimah and Miyan Muhammad Saeed, *Faiz hue hain mar kea mar* (Karachi: Jumbo, 2014), 29.

5. *Times of India*, 28 February 1971, 10.

6. See I. K. Gujral, *Urdu Adab: Faiz Number* 3, 4 (New Delhi: Anjuman-e Taraqqi-e Urdu [Hind], 1985): 76.

7. See "Gulzar: 'Late CM Jyoti Basu Said Poet FAIZ Needed NO PASSPORT!,'" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABjQrhM-TIo.

8. Faiz, *Nuskha*, 116.

9. Ibid., 146.

10. Estelle Dryland, "Faiz Ahmed Faiz and the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case," *Journal of South Asian Literature* 27, no. 2 (1992): 182.

11. Faiz, *Nushka*, 252.

12. Ibid., 265.

13. Ibid., 268.

14. Ibid., 155–56.

15. Ibid., 278–79.

16. Sayyid Taqi Abidi, *Faiz Fahmī: Taḥqīq o Tanqīd* (Lahore: Multi-Media Affairs, 2011), 590.

17. Faiz, *Nuskha*, 255.

18. Ibid., 320.

19. Faiz Ahmad Faiz, *Safarnāmah-e Cuba* (Lahore: National Publishing House, 1973), 32.

20. Faiz, *Nuskha*, 334.

21. Ibid., 338.

22. Salim Akhtar, *Josh kā Nafsiyāt Muṭāle'a aur dūsre maẓāmīn* (Lahore: Ferozsons, 1987) 28.

23. Faiz, *Nuskha*, 655–56.

24. Ibid., 700–701.

25. Ibid., 248.

26. Agha Shahid Ali, *The Rebel's Silhouette* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), preface (n.p.).

27. Taslim Ilahi Zulfi, *Faiz Ahman Faiz in Beirut* (Islamabad: Pakistan Academy of Letters, 2011), 60.

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28. Faiz, *Nuskha*, 259.

29. Khalil Ahmad, *Makālimat-e Faiz* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications), 171.

30. Ludmila Vassilyeva, "Faiz Ahmed Faiz and the Soviet Union," in *Daybreak: Writings on Faiz*, ed. Yasmeen Hameed (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 194.

31. Bedar Bakht, "Kuch 'ishq kiyā kuch kām kiyā," in *Faiz Fahmī: Taḥqīq o Tanqīd*, ed. Sayyid Taqi Abidi (Lahore: Multi-Media Affairs, 2011), 752.

32. Ralph Russell, "Faiz Ahmed Faiz: Poetry, Politics, and Pakistan," in Hameed, *Daybreak*, 57.

33. Faiz, *Nuskha*, 418.

34. *New York Times*, 22 April 1967.

35. Faiz, *Nuskha*, 694.

36. Sarfaraz Iqbal, "Dāman-e Yūsuf," in *Faiz Ahmad Faiz: Ahvāl o afkār*, ed. Marghub Ali (Delhi: Takhleeqkar, 2013), 501.

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